

NEWSLETTER

THE FRIENDS OF

THE SOLDIERS OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE MUSEUM



Churchill visiting RGH Summer 1942

AUTUMN 2022

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT



At last, I can report something of a return to normality, with our holding the Summer Reception after a hiatus of two years. My thanks to everyone for their patience and understanding, especially to Rollo and Janie Clifford, who so kindly hosted the event at their home in June. It was a gorgeous evening, with the hot weather of high summer still some weeks away. It was also superbly and generously supported by you the members.

The event was timely in more ways than one, as the donations we received has enabled us to support the Museum. Matthew Holden, our new Museum Operations Director, spells out the situation very clearly in his realistic but ultimately optimistic assessment report, the first of, we hope many contributions from him.

Thanks to your donations we have been able to make a grant to the Museum to assist with the purchase of picnic benches, enabling it to extend the use of the Museum café into Back Badge Square, and the upgrade of its burglar alarm system. However, to further support the Museum we must look to increasing our funds beyond those generated by our two principal annual events.

Looking ahead, we have our Chavenage Lecture on Friday 28th October, with a reception from 6.45pm. Our lecturer this year is former Gloster officer Nick Welch, who led the RGBW in the early 2000s and commanded at every level to Major General. He will share his thoughts on the design of the British Army to meet current needs and those of future warfare and will talk about his less than conventional life on leaving the Army. A natural raconteur with a healthy dose of humour and irreverence, this will undoubtedly be an enjoyable and highly informative evening.

Also looking ahead, our AGM will be held on Tuesday 1 November at 7.00pm in the Museum.

In this edition of the Newsletter John Penley concludes his study of the RGH's contribution to the campaign in the Western Desert with an account of the battle of Alam Halfa. Often overlooked between the two battles of El Alamein, here John brings out its strategic significance and the vital part the RGH played in it. Former Gloster Christopher Bayne gives an insight into life as a National Service officer in the early 1950s, a time of peace but hardly inactivity. Robert Turner presents Tony Streather's account of the Gloster's unexpected peacekeeping role in Cyprus 1963-4. We conclude with the first of two articles by Sir Henry Elwes about his late father, a Scots Guardsman but very much a 'soldier of Gloucestershire'. This first article relates his experiences in Norway in 1940, a salutary lesson for high command but for the troops on the ground it was, as Sir Henry relates, a matter of getting 'on with the job'. I am most grateful to all our contributors.

Dr Tim Brain OBE QPM

OPERATIONS DIRECTOR'S REPORT

At the time of writing, I have been in post for five months and feel I have a good idea of what the museum is about and what needs to be done. It is a huge honour to be telling the history of these two storied regiments. It was great to meet some of you at the exceptional Friends' Summer Reception and hopefully I can meet you all over time.

The pandemic was a tough time for all and museums were no different. However, it also gives us the opportunity to take stock and hit the reset button. With the Western World becoming more and more liberal and the huge reductions in the armed forces one needs to ask the question 'what is our relevance heading into the future?'

The vision I have for the museum is to change the demographic which we appeal to. Outside of those who have served in the regiments perhaps in the past we have concentrated on the small percentage of people who have an interest in military history. We now need to appeal to families and children which is a huge demographic. We will become a destination that parents check what's going on at the museum during the weekends and school holidays. It may not be appealing to them every time but it is important the museum becomes recognised as more of an event and community venue.

I fully understand that such a vision is not appealing to everyone. All museums are having to diversify in this manner though to survive. Even during my time at places like the Ashmolean it was accepted that this is what the future needs to look like. Hopefully, given time, you'll see the Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum as a place where new generations are coming to learn the incredible history of our two regiments.

All that said the military history will not be ignored. We have a huge new programme of high quality temporary exhibitions that will be hosted in the boardroom. These include 'The Six Royal Irish Regiments', 'The Falklands at 40' and a Jack Russell art exhibition about the Korean War Veterans.

I believe a key to success at the Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum will also be engaging more with our Friends and Members. Every place I have worked these two groups have formed the core of the museum family and community. As such it would be great if we could find a way to engage you more. So, if you have any ideas of events or perhaps talks that you would like to see then please do get in contact.

Matthew Holden
Operations Director
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2ND ROYAL GLOUCESTERSHIRE HUSSARS: THE FINAL CHAPTER

Alam Halfa 31 August to 2 September 1942

Colonel John Penley OBE TD

'Alam Halfa was the turning point of the desert war, and the first in a long series of defeats on every front which foreshadowed the defeat of Germany.' (Maj Gen FW Mellenthin: *Panzer Battles*)

In January 1942 at the conclusion of Operation Crusader, a tired and battered 2RGH were ordered back to Egypt to rest and refit. The Allies were notionally in control of Cyrenaica and should have been considering how best to advance into Tripoli, but the whole of the 8th Army was exhausted and supply lines were proving impossibly challenging. As a result, when the resupplied Africa Korps started to advance eastwards again, the 8th Army fell back to a defensive line from Gazala on the Mediterranean Coast to Bir Hacheim where the Free French were dug in. GOC Middle East General Claude Auchinleck developed his plans for a new offensive but wished to build up his forces before launching it.



Figure 1: A 'Grant' tank, A Sqn 2RGH, 1942

2RGH, as part of 22nd Armoured Bde, were re-equipped with new tanks, Crusaders with their modest armour and 2lb gun for G and H Squadrons, and American Grant tanks for F Sqn. According to Major Stuart Pitman, Grant tanks had been declared obsolete by the Americans in 1936 but here they proved something of a game changer. They were reasonably fast, mechanically more reliable than Crusaders, had very good frontal armour and, most importantly, a 75mm gun which fired either high explosive or a 14lb armour piercing (AP) shell, which had seven times the punch of a Crusader and could engage and destroy enemy at ranges of 1,500 yards. The drawback was this gun was mounted in a sponson on one side which meant that it had a limited traverse; but like the light Stuart tank, it also had a turret mounted 3mm gun. The German Panzer Mk III had a 37mm gun firing AP shells at 1,000 yards. The Mk IV had a short 75mm gun firing high explosive only. Therefore, for a few short weeks the Grant's 75mm gun gave the Allies equality if not supremacy in desert tank warfare.

Despite enormous pressure from Churchill, Auchinleck refused to launch his attack prematurely, with the result that he was surprised by Rommel, who launched his own offensive in May. In the fierce fighting that followed the attrition rate of men and equipment was devastating. On 28 May alone, the RGH lost 28 killed, injured and captured (KIC), with all of

F Sqn's tanks bar one, either being knocked out, so badly damaged as to be unable to fight, or were without ammunition. On 6 June the CO, Lt Col Birley, was fatally wounded, followed on 11 June by the death of Major Trevor, the acting CO, in a Stuka attack. The loss in such a short time of these two key members of the regiment left it without anyone with the necessary clout and authority to look after its interests at brigade, division and corps level.

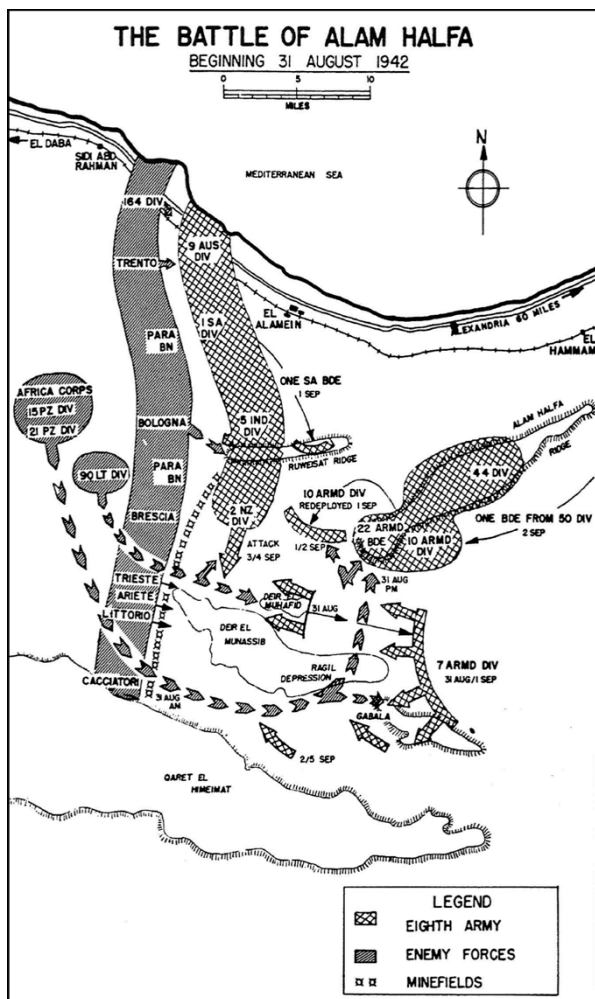


Figure 2: Alam Halfa, opening dispositions, from Montgomery Memoirs (1958).

along with RTR's own B Sqn. Later in the month they were joined by F Sqn RGH in Grants, commanded by Major Norris King, who had already earned an MC.¹ 5 RTR was commanded by Lt Col WM Hutton DSO MC and was part of 22nd Armoured Brigade commanded by the then Brigadier GPB ('Pip') Roberts², who had recently been commanding 3RTR. The Brigade were holding the Alam El Halfa ridge.

22nd Armoured Brigade then comprised 1/6 RTR, 3/4 City of London Yeomanry (CLY), 5RTR/RGH and The Greys (Royal Scots Dragoons), as well as the Rifle Brigade Anti-Tank Platoon and an anti-tank artillery battery both with 6lb guns. The initial deployment is shown

¹ He would receive a bar to his MC in 1944 and later a DSO.

² Later Maj General CB, DSO, MC

By 10 June with armour down to about 50 cruiser tanks and 20 'I' tanks, the British withdrew to the Egyptian frontier, leaving Torbruk isolated. The garrison surrendering on 22 June. Auchinleck took personal command of the 8th Army and formed a defensive line from El Alamein on the coast to the Quattara Depression in the south. Heavy fighting followed throughout July, but here the Axis forces were not merely checked but stopped. It was not enough to save Auchinleck, however, who was replaced by Alexander as CinC Middle East and by Montgomery as commander 8th Army. Montgomery made good use of Auchinleck's preparations but simplified his plans, making it clear that there would be no pursuit of the enemy and that armour was to dig and fight where it stood.

Towards the end of August G Sqn RGH was at Bir El Themid to the east of El Alamein and remained there until 3 September. In early August, H Sqn, once again in Crusaders, commanded by Major Jeremy Taylor, were ordered to join 5 Royal Tank Regiment (RTR), acting as their second light squadron,

in Figure 3 ('Sketch 1') which was part of an account prepared by Brigadier Roberts.³ The Greys in Grants were held in reserve as their tanks were relatively modern, the Brigade Commander took the view they were the best equipped to provide urgent reinforcements.

The units were in 'leaguer positions', some one to two miles back from designated defensive positions. Rommel's attack was expected any night at the end of August because of the need for a strong moon. There were a series of code words for alerting the Brigade and moving into their pre-prepared positions in 'wireless' silence.⁴

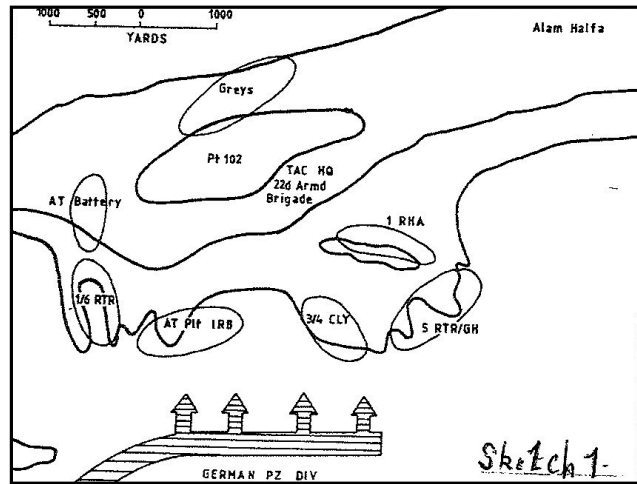


Figure 3: Position of 22nd Armoured Bde on Alama Halfa Ridge, approximately 17:00, 31 August 1942.

On the night of 30/31 August the Brigade commander was feeling below par and was trying to get some sleep in an ambulance away from the flies, but he was awakened by gunfire shortly after midnight. David Gilliat (Troop Leader F Sqn) wrote that after first listening to shelling it then seemed to die down and he then tried to get some sleep. Roberts received information that 8th Motor Brigade, which was towards the south of the minefields, was under a very determined attack and 22nd Armoured Brigade were ordered to be in their defensive positions by 04:00. The code words were sent out: '12 Bore' for H Sqn, 'Applesauce' for F, with no move before 01:30.

The enemy attack started in the early hours. Roberts in his memoirs states that by dawn a small attack in the north had been held, and there was fighting in the centre but there the situation was in hand. However, the Germans were making a very determined effort and by 11:00 strong enemy tank columns had penetrated the minefields, with the 4th Light Armoured Brigade withdrawing and the situation of 7th Motor Brigade unclear. Even so, matters were not going well for the Germans. The strong opposition they received from the two brigades combined with air attacks had made progress desperately slow and Gen Nehring, commander of the Afrika Korps (DAK), had been wounded. Rommel was minded to call off the attack. However, after consulting with the acting commander of the DAK, Col Bayerlein, he decided to try to take the Alam el Halfa feature, ordering the attack intended for 06:00 to take place at noon. The line of the advance was altered to bring the German 20th Corps opposite the western end of the Alam Halfa ridge rather than the eastern. The British positions could not have been more accurately placed.

The German advance got off to a ragged start, part at 13:00 and the rest an hour later. The radio reports received by Roberts made it clear that what had first been estimated as 40 tanks

³ First published in the US Marine Corps Gazette

⁴ The principal sources for this account are from an unpublished account by Jeremy Taylor and another by David Gilliat in 'Parade' (the Middle East weekly) in October 1942.

advancing towards Alam Halfa had become 90 tanks. In the early afternoon Roberts wanted his own direct information and sent out two of the light squadrons, one being H Sqn RGH, to gather information without themselves getting involved. Taylor's account states that they were able to see the enemy driving back 2nd Armoured Brigade and by 15:00 H Sqn was falling back in front of the panzers to try and draw them into range of the CLY and RGH Grant squadrons.

Both Roberts and Gilliat record seeing the enemy tank columns advancing along a line of telegraph posts. By then the number of tanks was estimated at 180. It appeared that the Germans would sweep past eastwards more than 1,200 yards to the front of the Grants. Between 15:00 and 16:00 Roberts was contacted by General Gatehouse, commander 10th Armoured Division, saying, 'I don't want you to think that we are in a blue funk or anything like that but if these fellows continue on as they are doing you will have to come out and hit them in the flank.' Roberts ordered 4CLY and 5RTR (which actually meant F Sqn RGH) to move out of their defensive positions but then was persuaded by Lt Col Hutton to stay his hand. Taylor records that H Sqn were heavily engaged in front of the Regiment, three or four tanks 'brewing up' at about 2,000 yards'. But by engaging H Sqn the Germans had brought themselves in range of F Sqn's Grants whom Taylor says gave battle in no uncertain terms.

It became apparent that there was a significant change in the enemy's tactics with the advance being led by Panzer Mk IVs rather than Mark IIIs which had the armour piercing capability. What the British were experiencing for the first time were German Mk IVs with a very long barrel. Roberts described it as 'the devil of a gun' which was in fact the stepped up 75mm they had heard about from Intelligence. The supremacy of the Grant was over as the new gun could for the first time penetrate their previously very effective front armour. Gilliat writes, 'Here's a funny thing; the Mark VIs are right in front which isn't usual at all...and for heaven's sake you can see now why they are in front. Sticking out of them a long way is a gun that would look more at home on a battleship than a tank.' He had counted 87 tanks. F Sqn on the left flank of the Brigade front had 12 Grants.

Gilliat's first-hand account of F Sqn's battle reads like a film script. His tank sustained a number of hits and when it was finally immobilised and his operator killed, he gave the order to bale out. He records that a number of the squadron's tanks were on fire including the Squadron leader's who he refers to as 'John' but actual names may not have been allowed in the publication.⁵ The wounds he received resulted in him losing his arm. Gilliat records seeing German tanks withdrawing after their encounter with F Sqn, which had only two tanks left operational by the time darkness fell.

Roberts confirms the figure of 87 tanks facing his brigade front. The CLY took heavy punishment and in what seemed to be a relatively short time all their tanks were on fire. Roberts decided that he must deploy his reserve and the Greys were given their orders to

⁵ His account can be read in Brian Burton's book "The Forgotten Regiment" although Burton mistakenly places Gilliat in G Squadron, which is odd given that Burton himself was in F Squadron.

advance to plug the CLY gap. The enemy were checked by the Rifle Brigade anti-tank guns who held their fire to a few hundred yards but sheer weight of numbers meant that some guns were over run. Roberts called in SOS artillery fire which came in right on top of the enemy tanks and this, together with the casualties they had received, checked them. After what seemed an age, but wasn't, the Greys arrived, although in desperation Roberts had radioed, 'Come on the Greys. Get your whips out!' With half an hour of daylight left the Greys came over the crest of the ridge and, unlike their predecessors' glorious but ultimately disastrous charge at Waterloo, they halted in the CLY prepared positions and their Grants 75mm guns started to hand out punishment. Roberts had redeployed what was left of the CLY to the left of the Brigade's position because he became aware of the enemy trying to work round the left flank

Taylor records that during the night of the 31 August a small column of tanks, about six, tried to turn the left flank and H Sqn were sent out to prevent this, which they did. Roberts states that the CLY, whom he had redeployed to left of the RTR/RGH position, had halted this move without mentioning the good work done by H Sqn, which must have meant it was a joint operation. But then Roberts also fails to mention in all his references to 5RTR that it was F Sqn RGH who provided their heavy fire power.

The Germans tried again in the morning with about 30 tanks by which time H Sqn were down to six tanks, four with 2lb guns and two with close support guns but with some 6lb anti-tank guns in support. H squadron got themselves into good hull down positions and the enemy were engaged at about 800 yards. After losing a few tanks the Germans turned away north but encountered what Taylor called 'Fortress E' where they suffered more casualties and were forced to withdraw.

As soon as darkness fell on 31 August/1 September the RAF started their bombing of the German forces with considerable effect. Engineers escorted by the companies of the Rifle Brigade were sent out to immobilise German tanks, although this did not prevent some from being recovered by the enemy. Roberts records that the casualty figures for Grant tanks were relatively light with 5RTR (ie F Sqn RGH) having only one. It is simply not possible to reconcile this figure with Gilliat's account of the squadron having only two tanks left and Pitman stating that all 12 of the Squadrons tanks were hit and 10 practically disabled, although they managed to keep them fighting. There was no early attack on 1 September by the enemy on 22nd Armoured Brigade's position, but then there was the attempt by the Germans to get round the Brigade's left flank.

The Corps commander Lt General Horrocks visited Brigade headquarters during the day, but his visit did not go unnoticed by the Germans who started shelling the position. The 'special attention' from the enemy was, in Roberts opinion, well worth it as he confirmed that Horrocks had a wonderful knack of inspiring confidence and enthusiasm. There was some concern about the Brigade's right flank and 1RTR engaged the enemy, but the attack was not pressed home with much determination.

For the 22nd Armoured Brigade by the end of 1 September the battle of Alam Halfa was almost over. The enemy, short of fuel, made no further attempt to break through the Allied positions. It would not be wrong to say that 22nd Armoured Brigade, with its two RGH squadrons, was the principal anvil on which the German attack was fatally fractured. Montgomery ordered that the enemy was to be harassed vigorously but there was to be no full counterattack. The one exception was an attempt by the New Zealand forces on the night of 3/4 September to close the mine field gap behind the Germans. This failed with, sadly, high casualties, the New Zealanders and 132nd Brigade, who were fighting their first battle, suffering 697 KIC.

H Sqn's patrol on the morning of 2 September found that the enemy had vanished but had left behind a 150mm self-propelled gun, the first to be captured intact. They also knocked out two more German tanks. Whilst H Sqn were still with 5RTR they were issued with the first Crusaders to have a 6lb gun. Taylor comments, with some justification, 'a pity they did not arrive a fortnight earlier.'

G Sqn were ordered south on 3 September and on 10 September were co-located with H and F Squadrons and there was even a visit by the little seen new CO Lt Col Cooper who had been posted to command the RGH in July. Taylor comments that he came to see H Sqn shoot the new guns but did not stay very long.

As is well known the fate of the Axis forces was sealed with the second Battle of El Alemein, launched on 23/24 October, and the start of the withdrawal of the enemy on 4 November which turned into something of a rout, albeit a hard fought one. However, for 2RGH this was their last battle, for it was disbanded in early 1943. During its fighting career 2RGH suffered in casualties 66 killed, 6 dying on active service, 100 wounded and 85 prisoners taken. Its members were between them awarded two DSOs, seven MCs, one DCM, fourteen MMs, two MBEs and fourteen mentions in Dispatches.

John Penley



A NATIONAL SERVICE OFFICER'S LIFE WITH THE GLOUCESTERS

Knook Camp, Warminster, September 1952 to December 1953

Christopher Bayne

Knook Camp was the home of the 1st Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment from December 1951 to December 1953, when it was fulfilling the important role of Demonstration Battalion for the School of Infantry. It was the Battalion's first assignment following Korea. If you drive along the A36 from Salisbury towards Warminster you come across Knook Camp. It is on the right side of the road, four miles from Warminster and shortly before the road bypasses the village of Heytesbury. The bypass did not exist in 1952, the main road ran straight through the village. Today Knook camp appears little changed except that it is now surrounded by a high security fence and some of the trees and hedges have grown very much taller. The officers' mess and the bachelor sleeping accommodation next door, slightly raised up above the camp, are still there.



Figure 1: The officers of 1st Bn Gloucestershire Regiment, 10 July 1953. Christopher Bayne is second from the right, back row. Lt Col Grist is front row, sixth from right. C Bayne collection.

I arrived at Knook Camp in September 1952. Despite having a father who was a retired naval captain who had served in the 1st World War including at the Battle of Jutland, I had no desire to embark on military service. I had no wish to become one of some 2.3 million Britons who undertook National Service between 1949 and 1961. Many of these conscripts were to serve in the Korean War or in the insurrections in Malaya or Kenya. More than 390 young men were killed and many more were seriously wounded. After National Service had been completed there followed a compulsory period of three years in the territorial army. This involved a compulsory summer camp each year and additional, but voluntary, training evenings and weekends.

As each year goes by the number still living who completed National Service continues to reduce. It is therefore hoped that this résumé of life at Knook Camp will contribute to the archive of the museum. It should also never be forgotten how the Gloucesters performance in Korea captured the imagination of people all over the UK. At the time I joined the regiment soldiers belonging to the Gloucesters were noticed and admired wherever they were seen. Members of the 1st Battalion were easily recognized by the blue American Citation which they wore on their shoulder when wearing uniform.

When I learnt in 1950 that the length of National Service was to be increased from 18 to 24 months that really was the last straw. I wanted to leave school, go to university and get on with life. However, I decided before leaving school, that if called up for National Service, I would hope to become an officer and thus join one of more than 30,000 National Service Officers who served between 1949 and 1961.

Just nine months after leaving school and seven months after joining the army I found myself posted to 1st Gloucesters as a 2nd Lieut. I was aged just 19. I had completed basic training with the Greenjackets in Winchester and 18 weeks of further training at Eaton Hall Officer Cadet school near Chester. I arrived by train at Warminster



Figure 2: Members of 1 Section, 12 Platoon before an 'attack' starts. C Bayne collection.

station on a Sunday evening reaching the officers mess at Knook Camp in time for supper. Almost the first thing I was told was that I would be in charge of No12 Platoon of D Company. This platoon still contained Korean Veterans who had managed to escape from the Imjin Battle and thus avoided the horrors of a Korean prison camp.

Thankfully, when I met my platoon the next morning, it was not quite as alarming as I expected. I found a very competent platoon sergeant, who thankfully did not dislike me, and a friendly bunch of soldiers, a mixture of national servicemen and regulars mostly veterans from Korea.

Whilst many National Service Officers, not posted overseas, may have had quite a boring time this was not true at Knook Camp. In our role as Demonstration Battalion for the School of Infantry we were kept very active. Sometimes we had to behave like actors as well as soldiers. The major set piece demonstration allocated to D Company was 'Company in the attack'. We performed this demonstration many times, often to VIP audiences comprising admirals, generals and senior members of the government. The attack took place in the middle of Salisbury Plain close to Imber Village. It would begin with an airstrike by four Sabre jet aircraft.

I would then advance with my platoon through a smoke screen. Being the platoon always on the right flank we were very close to the spectators. We carried and fired live ammunition. Thankfully there were no accidents involving the spectators.

Another assignment allocated specifically to my platoon was 'Operation Black Widow'. Usually on a dark night we would lay trip wires before ambushing a group of very tired subalterns from the Junior Officers Course at The School of Infantry. They would have already spent one cold winters night in the open. If we were lucky, we took one of them prisoner. This exercise also helped to improve the patrolling skills of my platoon and our ability to operate in the dark.

Perhaps one of my most vivid memories was the week we spent at Eastney Barracks, Portsmouth, with The Royal Marines. We were part of Exercise 'Runaground'. This involved putting to sea in landing craft and then making a landing on a long beach on Hayling Island, once again watched by an important crowd of spectators. On the first day, which was thankfully only a practice, my platoon's landing craft sprang a leak and nearly sank, so we had to be strapped around the sides of a motor launch brought to rescue us. One of the objectives of the exercise was to test out a new pill against sea sickness. Since the sea was usually calm and the weather fine, the objective was not achieved. The exercise took place on each of five days in the early morning and we were back in Eastney Barracks by breakfast and free for the rest of the day. Some of us went to watch Gloucestershire playing Hampshire at cricket.

In parallel with life with my platoon was life in the officers' mess. Thursdays were guest nights; the food was fabulous and the subalterns sitting at the end of the table enjoyed each other's company and sometimes more than just a few drinks. We were a mixture of regulars and national service officers. After the Korean War had ended and the officers and soldiers imprisoned so brutally in North Korea had come home, several of them joined us at guest nights. I remember playing canasta with Captain Farrar Hockley and meeting Colonel Carne. In the village of Heytesbury nearby in a huge manor house lived the recluse author and soldier Siegfried Sassoon. He never came to a guest night because he never replied to our invitations.

Although I am writing about events which took place more than 70 years ago, much remains fresh in my mind and I have also been able to refer to a few copies of *The Back Badge Magazine*, which I had kept in our garage. The Mess was extremely friendly, the regular officers accepted us as equals, and there was a spirit of comradeship which might not have existed in civilian life. On Tuesday evenings an enthusiastic regular captain would lead us in all male Scottish Country Dancing, learning as he went along from a manual. As a young officer one was at an advantage if one played some sport to a reasonable standard. The Adjutant became much friendlier to me when he knew I played cricket and in fact I had a lot of time off playing this wonderful game for the regiment under his captaincy. Life in the mess was a life in which the female sex really played no part at all. Having been at a boys' public school it was just a continuation of the life I had been used to before joining the army.

We were immensely proud of our band and of our Corps of Drums. Our band was one of two leading the Coronation Procession and old television film of the occasion shows an impressive performance.

In addition to our work on demonstrations we did spend a lot of time on the Knook Camp drill square. It was oblong and on a slope! Many early morning practices with the whole

battalion present would be preparation for major ceremonial parades with the officers carrying swords. During my time we were inspected, on different occasions, by the Commanding Officer of the School of Infantry, Brigadier RE Goodwin, the Colonel of the Regiment, Lt General Edward Weatherall, and, most important of all, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Harding, later to become Field Marshall Baron Harding of Petherton. I have to say that I got a bit bored with all this drill!

My time at Knook Camp came to an end in December 1953 when the Battalion moved to Barnard Castle. Most of the officers seemed to get there somehow under their own steam. Just two of us were left, another subaltern and me, and we were put in charge of a train hired for the occasion to take the Battalion from Warminster Station to Barnard Castle on a long and slow journey which lasted all day. There was a crisis at Derby since a Company Sergeant Major decided that there should be a count of the rifles stored in the luggage van. The count suggested that one had disappeared. Panic ensued and phone calls were made. A second count made later thankfully showed that the first count was wrong.

My time with the territorials came to an end in 1956. Sixty-six years have passed since then but my links with the military remain. I have one grandchild who has passed through Dartmouth and is a sub lieutenant in the Royal Navy, working in submarines. I have another grandchild who has just completed Sandhurst and joined the Light Dragoons, and a further grandchild presently at Sandhurst and passing out in 2023. Who knows how or why this has come about? Maybe there is something in the genes passing from my father down through three generations to his great grandchildren.

Christophe Bayne



Figure 4: Not all work. 12 Platoon float, Back Badge Day 1953. C Bayne collection.

A TRAGIC CHRISTMAS IN CYPRUS 1963-64

Lt Col Tony Streater OBE

Transcribed and edited by Professor Robert Turner FSA



Figure 1: Lt Col Tony Streater

Lt Col Tony Streater OBE (1926-2018) was CO of the Gloucestershire Regiment 1967-71. He was a noted mountaineer who, amongst his other many achievements, made the first ascent of Kanchenjunga, the world's third highest mountain, in 1955. This article is a shortened version of the notes he used for a lecture he gave whilst he was an instructor at RMA, Sandhurst, edited and presented here by his biographer and FOSGM member, Robert Turner. When visiting the Streater's house to collate material for his biography, Robert came across these notes which Tony had used many years ago in a 'IWT' ('I Was There') lecture to cadets at Sandhurst entitled *I was there - Cyprus 1963-4*. Thanks to Robert's collation these important notes are preserved as a contemporary account that may otherwise have been lost.

Cyprus was ceded to Britain by the Ottoman Emperor in 1878 and formally became a Crown Colony when Turkey joined the Germans in WW1. The Greek and Turkish populations lived together until 1955 when the Greek-Cypriot EOKA movement instigated an independence insurgency, with the aim of not only gaining independence from Britain but also uniting Cyprus with mainland Greece. Governor General Sir John Harding declared a state of emergency, and a bitter struggle ensued until independence was granted in 1960. The British retained two sovereign bases, Akrotiri and Dhekelia. Peace was, however, not assured as EOKA rebels continued to agitate for *Enosis*, union with Greece. It was fiercely opposed by the Turkish Cypriots, who looked to mainland Turkey for support. Just a few years after independence the scene was set for another upsurge in violence, one in which the British garrison found itself in the middle. An uneasy peace followed, until an EOKA-led coup in 1974 resulted in a Turkish invasion and a permanent division of the island along ethnic lines. *TB*

In 1963, the Glosters were stationed on the island of Cyprus and B Company's barracks in Episkopi were the best we had seen for years. The countryside was attractive, the climate good, the sandy beaches were plentiful and the wine cheap. The people seemed cheerful and there was no anti-British feeling. One could ski in Troodos and swim in Episkopi on the same day!

In May 1963 I rejoined the Battalion, having the previous month led an expedition that had walked from the south of Greece to the north through the Pindus mountains. I encountered a very different Greek to those I was to find in Cyprus where it was soon apparent that the deep-rooted mutual mistrust between Greeks and Turks on the island might lead to another crisis.

Some days before Christmas one of the members of B Company had been playing darts and drinking with some Greek friends in a bar where he overheard some very alarming remarks

and reported to me that an attack by Greek Cypriots with their secret army against the Turks was imminent. I sent him to Intelligence.

There had been fighting in Larnaca and the Battalion had been on four hours' notice to move but the Christmas festivities had taken place as best they could.

On Christmas Day the Commanding Officer, Lt Col Peter Varwell and most of the other senior officers were at a party in my house when the CO was sent for by Maj General Peter Young, then GOC Cyprus. At an O Group held in the hall of my quarter late that night, we heard that serious fighting had broken out in Nicosia and the Glosters were to move early on Boxing Day morning to help keep the peace - though how they would do this was not made clear.

To avoid confusion, we were ordered to identify our vehicles with Union Jacks and made a fine sight as we drove out of Episkopi the next morning with the Union Flags streaming from tent poles tied to our Land Rovers and spread over the bonnets of the lorries.

At 'Half Way House' a Turkish enclave at the Larnaca and Nicosia road junction, the Turks armed with shot guns, manned a road block but cheerfully waved the Glosters through though no Greeks would pass that way that day.

Skirting the city, heading for our base at the airfield, we found the streets deserted and the houses shuttered. A few bewildered people raised a pathetic cheer somehow thinking that their troubles were now over, little did they know that they were just beginning.

General Young had tried to achieve a Tripartite agreement for the deployment of a Truce Force to include both Greek and Turkish units, but mutual mistrust made this impossible so that for three difficult months, peace keeping duties was left to the British. Originally these consisted of just the Rifle Brigade and the Glosters, a Squadron of Sappers and a wing of the RAF Regiment though more troops flooded in.

Recces revealed the scene in Nicosia to be grim with corpses still littering the streets, looting and vandalism had been widespread, whole rows of houses had been ransacked and uncontrolled arson was rapidly spreading.

A Green Line was agreed - green as this was the colour of Captain John Waters' own chinagraph pencil which he handed to the General. John Waters later served as 2i/c in the Falklands and became General Waters. The Glosters were to take over the Greek and Turkish positions along this 'frontier'.

B Company were the first company in and took over the Ledra Palace Hotel, the Conaro Hotel and the Nicosia Club with an RAF unit in the Residency. There was [a] flip side to this luxurious accommodation - I received a bill of £500 for my occupancy of the Ledra ballroom where the company had bedded down and General Young was sued for £60,000 for his forceful entry into the Conaro Hotel!

I moved to take over our positions from the occupying Greek irregulars. Suspicious unshaven faces with cocked rifles greeted our approach. A request to a former friendly waiter whom I

knew, for their 'leader' to meet me resulted in 'Major' Kostos with his rank signified by cardboard badges secured with safety pins, being brought to me. The occupancy of the Ledra hotel was peaceful and the Greeks withdrew to the nearby prison which was back from the Green Line and was to remain their base. The Hotel was in neutral ground and fire positions faced both directions in equal numbers to avoid accusations of being partial. A wrong move could easily result in serious international consequences.

Then came the task of clearing both the Greeks and Turks back to their respective sides of the Green Line and keeping them there by endless patrolling on foot and in vehicles, day and night. The patience and tact of the British soldier came into their own.

In one house I recall finding a gang of Greek Cypriot youths who said they had been told to stay there - a telephone call to their leader ended in them leaving. As our soldiers had no official power to disarm or arrest them, everything depended on bluff. The next day this gang of toughs had returned with armbands stating that they were '*Special Policemen*'. Eventually intervention at the highest level had them removed.

With the arrival of more British troops, I vacated my luxury accommodation and retired to the rural mining area of Lefka-Xeros on the north-west of the island where one of the largest Turkish communities lived with the Turks in Lefka opposed across the valley by the Greeks in Xeros. A full-scale battle was a distinct possibility. Our task was to keep them apart by constant patrolling.

I tried to get the respective leaders to come to an agreement so that work in the mines on which both sides were dependent for employment, could restart. Just as we were getting to know the area and doing some good we were recalled to Nicosia where the situation had deteriorated.

Back in Nicosia, we were on the Green Line in the northern suburbs where both sides frustrated by a lack of progress reaching a political agreement, were bursting for a fight. The Greeks were impatient to get stuck into the Turks and the Turks would welcome this and provoked the Greeks in every way, confident of support from the Turkish Force poised just over the water.

The British were so sited that they could fire along the Green Line if any tried to cross it but how we should do this in self-defence was never quite established.

My main contact on the Greek side was a fanatical Police Sergeant Bambos. I spent hours drinking coffee with him so that I could keep tabs on him (even Greeks drink Turkish coffee). It was not unusual for him to summon a few of his '*Special Police*' (EOKA thugs) and race off to the Green Line to be met by the Turkish police and each side would face each other with cocked rifles shouting abuse and seeking to provoke each other - one shot from an excitable youth would have led to terrible consequences

The nearest anyone came to firing was when the Greek police were incensed by Turkish shepherds driving their sheep into wheat fields which the Greeks claimed were theirs. At one stage a young policeman jumped into a trench and prepared to take careful aim and I swore that the young policeman was about to press the trigger when I gave him a smart smack on his

bottom with my Regimental ash plant. The young man failed to shoot the shepherd but turned to shoot me instead!

The Glosters were withdrawn from Nicosia to be redeployed on the south west of the island to look after the families in Limassol and to be available should further trouble break out in Limassol and were based at the Battalion HQ in the camp at Episkopi.

B Company was sent to take over Katina and most of the outlying Paphos district. There had been no serious fighting. It was a vast parish, but I had two and sometime three helicopters to help me cover the outlying villages. One platoon looked after the mixed village of Ktima. They were kept busy patrolling night and day and ensuring that no preparations for battle were going on in either side.

Each day in the District Officer's office, I held a meeting with a Turkish solicitor representing his community and the Superintendent of Police representing the Greeks. Perhaps our greatest success was to form a 'Peace Mission'. I persuaded a Turk and a Greek Police Inspector to accompany me, visiting by helicopter the outlying villages of both communities trying to establish freedom of movement and to bring life back to normal.



Figures 2 & 3: British soldiers evacuating Cypriot civilians 1963-4.

I felt that my time in Paphos was all too short and just as I felt that B Company were being accepted, they were replaced by a Gunner Regiment. It had been too big a task for a company and I doubt if we could have kept it up for long. Alas a few days later a hot head fired a shot in the market and a bloody battle followed - both sides blaming the other.

We were then moved briefly to the Troodos mountains to defend the radar and radio installations but plenty of snow remained and when not digging, the soldiers were able to ski.

At this stage the Glosters fired their only shot in anger.

Despite having given assurances that they would not attack, the Greeks launched a full-scale attack on the isolated village of Malia in the foothills of Troodos. Hundreds of women and children took refuge in the school at the end of the village. Even after the Turks had surrendered their weapons, the Greeks opened fire on the school with rocket launchers. The commander of the recece detachment, Capt Crush and Sgt Ramsden, had no option [but] to reply with the Browning in their Ferret Scout Car. There was a surprised silence and not a single further shot was fired.

I moved in with my company HQ to try to sort out the refugee problem. It was impossible to remain impartial about Malia. In my view this was out and out aggression by the Greeks and the wanton destruction caused by them had to be seen to be believed.

Finally, we had to take over Limassol.

Towards the end of March, plans for the United Nations to take over peace keeping duties from the Truce Force were well advanced. The Canadian contingent had already arrived in Nicosia and were keen to show the flag and see something of the island.

I received an urgent telephone call one day from Bn HQ saying that a company of Canadians had already left Nicosia by road to come and show the flag in Limassol. There had been a muddle and the General didn't want them in Limassol at this stage. It would have made the job of the British troops quite impossible for their last few days of peace keeping. I was to meet the Canadians on the outskirts of Limassol and politely turned them back.

It so happened that the Company Commander and I had been in Korea together. We had a pleasant chat, my soldiers gave the Canadians a few tips about Cyprus and they left to return to Nicosia. But somehow the Press had come to hear of the visit and the photographers were there.

On the front page of the local newspaper next day was large photograph of the Canadian company Commander and me talking. The caption stated that 'the filthy British Imperialists' who, according to the paper were entirely responsible for the trouble in the first place, were turning away by force the splendid United Nations troops who had come to solve the Cyprus problem.

The wheel had gone the full turn since our welcome into Nicosia on Boxing Day.

Our Peace Keeping duties had placed us in an interesting and unique role. There was no enemy; Tactics C [Aid to the Civil Power] did not apply. Much of the time the task was dull and monotonous with endless hours of patrolling and sentry duty with nothing to report. But there were flashes of danger and excitement. And always the knowledge that a faulty decision, a rude word at the wrong time, a sleepy sentry, could lead to disastrous consequences.

Tony Streater

No thanks were received for what they did but for three long and difficult months, the British Soldier alone, by his patience, fairness and good humour had kept the peace in Cyprus. But someone had noted Tony's handling of this tricky situation and he was awarded his MBE, later to be advanced to OBE, but

that was for his successful Joint British Army and Royal Nepalese Army Everest Expedition to the Himalayas in 1976 and for putting British soldiers indeed the first Englishmen, on the top of Mount Everest.

Robert Turner

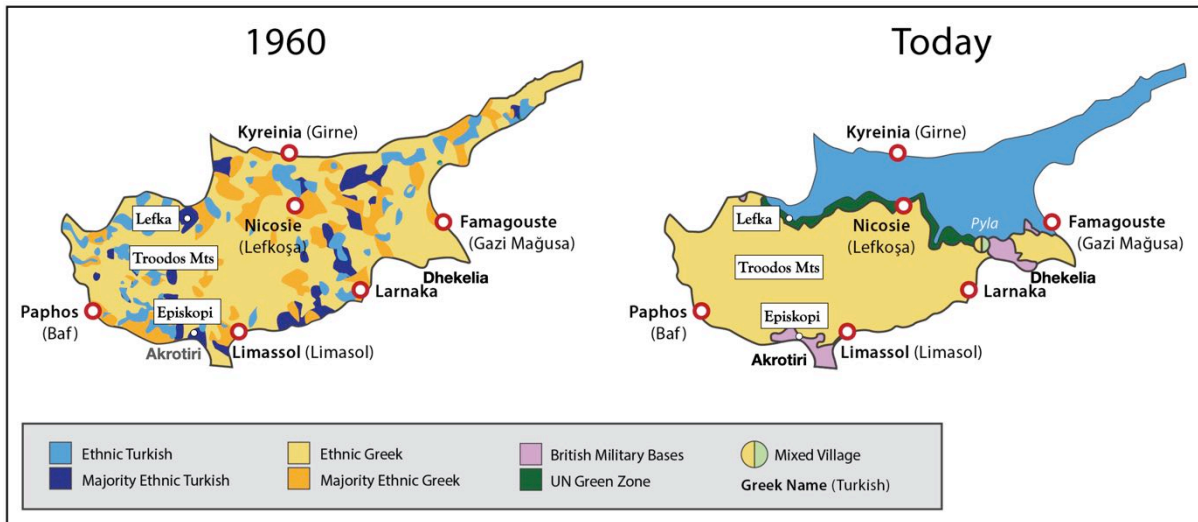


Figure 4: Cyprus 1960 and today, showing ethnic divisions and principal locations.



Figure 5: The 'Green Line' today.

JOHN ELWES OF COLESBOURNE

Sir Henry Elwes KCVO KStJ JP DL

Sand, Snow and Sand Again

John Elwes of Colesbourne followed his father and grandfather into the Scots Guards, gaining his commission in 1926 aged 20. After initial training he was posted to the 1st Battalion in London for ceremonial duties guarding Buckingham Palace and the Bank of England. In 1930 life in London for a young officer with no outside income was very expensive and when his mess bills became impossible, he sought a secondment to the Transjordan Frontier Force (TJFF) in Palestine.



Figure 1: Major John Elwes MC 1906-43. H Elwes collection.

Sand



Figure 2: John Elwes 1934. H Elwes collection.

He was posted to Zarqa, about 30 miles north of Amman, for training and then served in the horse squadron and later in the Camel Company, stationed at Ma'an about two hundred miles further south. The Camel Company also became a Motor company, with two Rolls Royce armoured car conversions amongst other vehicles. Duties included regular desert patrols sorting out Arab tribal disputes, and there seemed to be a lot of time for horse and camel shows and competitions, polo, racing and jackal hunting with a pack of hounds, the Ramleh Vale, under the mastership of Captain Geoffrey Warden.

The pack consisted of some hounds sent over by John's father when he disbanded his private pack in 1932. It is claimed that John was the first person to train a camel to jump fences like a horse. Photo albums also show trips to Petra, the Pyramids and the ancient ruins of Jerash etc. John learned Arabic which was to serve him well when he was back with the Scots Guards in the 8th Army in North Africa in 1942. By all accounts the TJFF was a very enjoyable five years' posting, and after he left he was followed by John Hackett who inherited his horse called 'Elwes'. After the war General Sir John Hackett rejoined the TJFF to command the unit until it was disbanded in 1947.

In 1935 John married and rejoined his regiment, by then at Maadi in Egypt, where I spent the first two years of my life. At the time the Regimental Colours were stored in a bank in Cairo and brought out only for ceremonial occasions!

The regiment returned to London in 1937 for another round of public duties, and John was promoted captain under the command of Lt Col Trappes-Lomax when the regiment joined the British Expeditionary Force for service in Norway in 1940. The regiment waited for orders with almost no battle training.

Snow

Churchill was keen to stop the transport of valuable iron ore from Sweden to Germany via Narvik because the Baltic froze in wintertime and the ports on the west coast of Norway benefitted from the Gulf Stream. Orders between the Prime Minister and government, the Cabinet Office and the service chiefs were very muddled and the force was put on two false mobilisation orders before being stood down, the second time appropriately on April Fools' Day, before final embarkation on 14 April 1940, by which time Germany had acted upon the obvious indecision by Great Britain and had already invaded the neutral Norway and gained most of the west coast landing harbours. The Regiment had had only minimal training for active service in snow and was greatly outnumbered and although the British Navy was dominant, air support for a landing and throughout the mission was minimal.

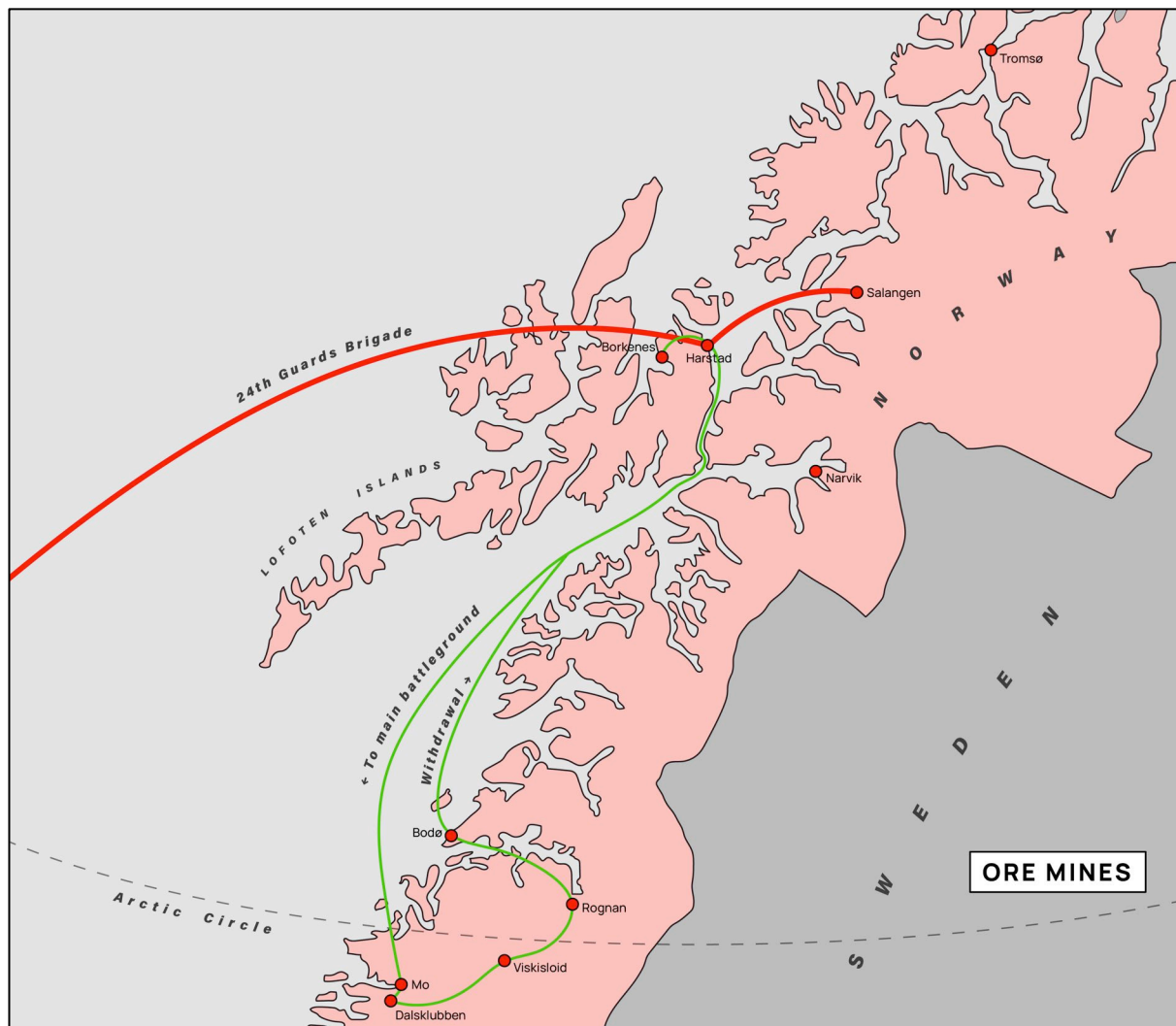


Figure 3: Scots Guards principal deployments Norway 1940.

On embarkation, the regiment formed part of the 24th Guards Brigade with the 1st Irish Guards and various territorial regiments including 2nd South Wales Borderers, and sailed from Glasgow towards Harstad in the liner *Southampton*. Sundry other territorial/reservist units were on their way to Namsos, also escorted by a flotilla of warships. The crossing was very rough with waves enveloping the decks of the warships which met them north of Cape Wrath, and the landing was made at Salangen on the mainland about 35 miles northwest of Narvik. John wrote a letter home to say that the weather was mild and sunny, and it looked very beautiful and an ideal place for a holiday! Under John's command B Company moved to Harstad on the Lofoten Islands to guard the force headquarters. After landing, the march of six miles in full kit was followed by a six-day blizzard when snow filled the trenches as soon as they were dug. On arrival at Harstad there had been irregular bombing but no British air support was to be seen, and the ship carrying 400 pairs of skis was diverted to Tromso but the boots were on another ship at Salangen! Very unhelpful. In fact, throughout the campaign much equipment such as field guns and ammunition were on different ships, with catastrophic results when one ship or other was lost and weapons were separated from ammunition.

On 10 April a destroyer force under Captain Warburton-Lee, had entered Narvik fjord and done tremendous damage to the German Navy, although Warburton-Lee lost his life and was awarded a posthumous VC. On 13 April a larger force under Admiral Whitworth re-entered the fjord, destroying or severely damaging eight German destroyers. It was said that so much damage had been done and that German morale was very low that the 24th Brigade could probably have taken the town with relative ease, but Trappes-Lomax kept to his original orders from London.

Various patrols were carried out, including John going on patrol to Narvik on 4 May. On 10 May the Battalion formed up to go by sea to Mo some 300 miles south and on arrival bombing made unloading very difficult and some more kit was lost, before the Battalion moved to Dalsklubben on the south side of the fjord, loaded with the remainder of their kit. The regiment was exhausted and hungry and came under immediate attack. Snow was 4ft deep and it was impossible to set up observation posts to fend off any attacks. While struggling in the heat of battle, John's wife received a letter from the regimental HQ telling her that John had left with an unpaid mess bill of 2/11d (15 pence) and would she please pay it now!

17/18 May was a long night, not wholly dark because they were on the Arctic Circle, and battle continued at close quarters, where British rifles were no match for German machine guns although the German fire was very indiscriminate. The German force had been enlarged by about 150 parachutists dropped on a frozen lake nearby and cunningly wearing Norwegian uniforms! Enemy mortars were fortunately not very effective in deep snow.

B Company was moved to cover the withdrawal of the remainder of the Battalion but communication between them was lost and they found the Germans behind them as well as in front, and they were forced to take to the mountains. Two guardsmen fell off a 200ft cliff, fortunately into deep snow, and failed to rejoin their company but made their way to neutral Sweden. The remainder climbed to 2,000 feet through deep snow with a crisp ice cap and were under constant fire most of the way. After crossing two mountains on the way they then had to cross a river 'as big as the Thames at Putney' in three boats, three at a time, waiting for German

attack at any moment. Hungry and exhausted, they found a small store of food left by a friendly Swedish guide Count Lewenhaupt. Many exhausted guardsmen simply wanted to lie down in the snow to die and had to be beaten with rifle butts to carry on, and after 20 miles through deep snow, no rations and under fire for a lot of the way, the Company finally rejoined the Battalion with the loss of only one man. John Elwes was awarded the Military Cross for his achievement.

The Battalion, less B Company, had heavy fighting all the way through the snowbelt to Viskiskold and finally reached Rognon, where B Company made contact again after a very difficult mountain climb under fire a lot of the way. The whole Regiment were very tired and hungry, and morale was low after constant ground attack and air bombing. British air support was nowhere to be seen. They finally reached Bodo where fighting continued for several days.

On 23 May the force commander, Major General Claude Auchinleck, had called upon Brigade Commander Colin Gubbins to sack Lt Col Trappes-Lomax in the middle of battle for failing to undertake orders. He was a popular Commanding Officer but maybe overprotective of the Battalion. In some ways it is a pity that he didn't take Narvik at the start of the campaign when the Germans were at their weakest after Warburton-Lee's successful attacks.

On 26 May Auchinleck finally ordered abandonment of the campaign and a rapid evacuation, and Gubbins was to manage this but on no account to tell the Norwegians. A warship took the Regiment by sea to Harstat, where comfortable billets were found and a bath and pyjamas could be had for the first time for several weeks.

On return to Britain, Gubbins was awarded DSO for his management of the withdrawal.

Much has been written about the badly planned and badly managed campaign with almost no air cover which resulted in a total failure to take Narvik and an embarrassing withdrawal just a few weeks before the British withdrawal at Dunkirk. Some say that the RAF deliberately held back on air power which contributed to the failure of the campaign.

The Campaign has been described as a 'fiasco', 'doomed before the start' and a 'disaster' and much more, and illustrated the chaotic decision-making in London, constant interference by Churchill, the failure of cooperation between the services, the loss of vital equipment, a heavy reliance upon insufficiently trained territorial soldiers, the lack of air cover and much more. Interestingly, John Elwes never mentioned any of the shortcomings in his letters or diary but just got on with the job on the ground. It can be noted here that his father, 25 years earlier, had taken a major part in Churchill's other disaster at Gallipoli, while commanding the Royal Gloucestershire Hussars after transferring his commission from the Scots Guards in 1906.

Henry Elwes

Part 2: 1942 - 'Back to Sand and the 8th Army in the Desert and Killed near Mareth' - to follow.

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Chavenage Lecture

Friday 28th October 2021, 6.45pm

Chavenage House, Tetbury

Lecturer: Nick Welch OBE

‘On Her Majesty’s Service, and Her Majesty’s Pleasure’

Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 1st November 2022, 7.00pm

The Long Room, Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum, The Docks, Gloucester,
GL1 2HE

Summer Reception

Tuesday 20th June 2023, from 6.30pm

Highnam Court, Gloucester

MUSEUM FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Exhibitions

‘The Irish Soldier in the British Army’

Until 21st September 2022

‘Falklands at 40’

7th October to 4th December 2022

Calling all budding authors...

We welcome contributions from members and our associates on subjects related to the Museum, the military life of Gloucestershire, and more general aspects of military history. Please contact the Editor, Dr Tim Brain on timothy.brain@btinternet.com, who will be very pleased to offer advice.